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Stories of Debt and Service: Wheeling Jesuit Mojo

Wheeling Jesuit Students

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STORIES OF DEBT AND SERVICE

setting would be a good fit. Often these students are pursuing the combination of “as perfect as possible” and “as soon as possible.” Conflicting narratives of “perfect” or “success” swirl around them, informed by a board room of peers, professors, family, cultural and gender norms, faith traditions, or financial pressures; and it can be easy to lose one’s unique story or sense of direction in the noise.

I also notice a heightened expectation among students that their first job will define their professional identity in a permanent way. If they don’t get it right, they imagine long-lasting negative consequences. And as they try to get it right, students can experience paralysis centered on the convergence of endless information about options and the sense that no job description seems

to fit their interests and skills exactly. They constantly feel behind.

I wonder, though, whether it’s possible both to make some concrete progress on your search and also to be intentional as you do so. My words find their roots in the Jesuit idea of contemplation in action. While it’s tempting to shoot from the hip when one’s graduation date is looming or is past – ten applications a day, no, twenty if I don’t write a cover letter – the wisest and most productive steps forward will usually be informed by intentional reflection.

Progress and intentionality look different for everyone. There are a number of possible next steps to fit different individuals’ needs. I suggest some helpful ideas in the accompanying boxed text.

Meanwhile, what about your bills? Signing up to work for a temp

agency or finding another stopgap option can provide stability as well as a professional experience that could further inform your reflection process. St. Ignatius encourages us to pray the Examen consistently, whether we feel completely lost or as though we’ve arrived. As contemplation forms your next steps, those steps will give you new ideas and experiences upon which to reflect. Soon enough you may come to value the ongoing journey as much as or even more than the first destination. Hang in there! ■

Beth Harlan is the associate director of the career education center at Georgetown University; she does career education and counseling.

Wheeling Jesuit MoJo

By Wheeling Jesuit Students

Every Friday evening at 5:15pm, around 30-40 people leave the campus of Wheeling Jesuit University to travel to the “rough part of town,” where members of the Mother Jones House have prepared a community dinner. Professors, campus ministers, neighbors, and fellow students gather together for weekly fellowship and a shared meal, while the six house residents ensure people feel welcomed and well-fed. First glance would show amateur cooks bustling around, but if you stay long enough

you will see the rich community that has formed around six friends who have chosen a distinctive way of living out our Jesuit mission.

We are the Mother Jones House, an intentional community of undergraduate students whose everyday life is focused around six pillars: faith, community, simplicity, social justice, learning, and service. The house is a close partnership between Wheeling Jesuit University and Laughlin Memorial Chapel, an after-school program for neighborhood students. We also work closely with Catholic Charities Neighborhood

Center to deliver meals to homebound individuals. Our service sites and neighbors have become just as familiar to us as our campus and classmates.

We have chosen to live in community at “MoJo,” as we affectionately call it, for a variety of reasons. MoJo offers a chance to get away from the chaotic atmosphere of campus and serves as a home away from home. Our interest in MoJo partially stemmed out of a restlessness acquired from our Jesuit education. Immersing ourselves in the reality of our neighborhood has inspired us to

STORIES OF DEBT AND SERVICE



Members and friends at Mother Jones House pray together in community.

continue our search for social justice. By living together intentionally, we are fostering the communion between college students and East Wheeling, while committed to a lifestyle of service can be both fulfilling and draining.

Mojo provides opportunities that living in a dorm never will. While we learn about solidarity and critical social reflection in our classes at WJU, here we have the opportunity to put them to use in our interactions with housemates and neighbors. One of the most important things we

learn is the value of community and our place within it. We learn about passion and dedication from our neighbors, the difference makers in this city, and how a shared vision can transform a group of people into a beautiful community.

While we all agree that Mojo is an incredible and unique opportunity for which we are immensely grateful, our time here has not been without challenges. As housemates, we find that some uncomfortable conversations are unavoidable and conflicts are nearly impossible to prevent; and our busy schedules leave little time for impromptu hangouts. Within the house, we attempt to resolve issues as soon as they arise, but our neighborhood offers its own set of concerns that are more difficult to confront. Sometimes we cannot assist our neighbors in the ways they would like – such as monetarily – but we are learning to accept that our mission has its limits.

We have all come from different backgrounds, with different paths for our

future, but we have all found a home here in East Wheeling. Whether it is for ourselves or any of our beloved guests throughout the year, the Mother Jones House is a meaningful presence in this community and in our lives. What we have learned here we will take with us throughout our lives, especially the desire to make a difference no matter where we are. In the words of our namesake, Mary Harris Jones, “Pray for the dead and fight like hell for the living!”

If you are ever in Wheeling, West Virginia, on a Friday afternoon, please stop by for dinner. There is always room at the table. ■

Wheeling Jesuit students involved with Mother Jones House: DJ Currence (senior, accounting); Brady Kukawka (senior, nursing); Elizabeth Nawrocki (senior, theology); Sarah Sleevi (senior, psychology); Wolfgang Zober (senior, physics); and also Tom Weinandy (house mentor)